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UNCLAS ANKARA 006689

SIPDIS

OES FOR PDAS ROCK, PCI; EUR/EX

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: IS THERE A FUTURE FOR THE ANKARA HUB

¶1. Embassy Ankara and REO Ankara recommend that EUR and OES consider closing the Hub in Ankara upon the departure of the incumbent REO. This proposal has been discussed with Hub embassies. Most agreed that without program funding the Hub cannot be effective. Kiev, however, saw value in having someone cover regional issues, even if there are no programs.

¶2. The Ankara Hub was established in 1999 to cover the Black Sea/Caucasus region (Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria). The region suffers from a number of transboundary EST&H problems that the Hubs were established to address. These include industrial pollution, inadequate wastewater treatment, excessive nutrient runoff into the Black Sea and widespread deforestation. Cooperation among the Black Sea/Caucasus countries is poor and is complicated by historical animosities and suspicions. Regional organizations, such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), are largely ineffective in addressing regional problems. In addition, USAID programs in the region -- particularly environmental programs -- have been sharply reduced.

¶3. The challenges and opportunities for the Hub are apparent. However, a lack of program funding has limited the efforts of the Ankara Hub to fulfill its role. The Ankara Hub has never been allotted funds from the annual OESI program for regional activities. REO and his predecessor have visited client posts and consulted with regional organizations and NGOs to develop an expertise on the EST&H challenges facing the region, support efforts to build regional cooperation and raise awareness of these issues. However, identification of issues needing Hub intervention has not resulted in funding to support Hub initiatives. The absence of program funding and the relatively higher priority accorded other issues in a region where embassies have a challenging agenda mean that the Ankara Hub can point to few examples where Hub efforts have contributed to new initiatives or enhanced regional cooperation. As the 2002 draft report on Environmental Hubs pointed out: The ability of the Hubs "to stimulate the sort of regional environmental science and health activities, such as regional environmental workshops, that are central to their mandate is dependent on their access to some funding of this kind" (program funding). "Promoting regional dialogue takes money."

¶4. Without program funds, EUR, OES and Ankara resources maintaining a Hub are not well utilized. Space and support resources in Ankara are at a premium; we do not encourage regional activities here. While we have been happy to provide support for important science and environmental activities, the Hub experience here has been marginal. Embassy Ankara and REO recommend that the Department consider closing the Hub upon departure of the incumbent.

EDELMAN